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ABSTRACT

A model summer program for developmentally advanced preschoolers is described, including identification procedures, staffing, and curriculum. An open classroom approach was utilized with art, music, dance, and drama activities to encourage creative growth; reading, math, and science taught in an exploratory way for those children ready for acceleration; an individualized motor development program; and parent education. Activities were designed to emphasize natural consequences, responsibility, positive self-concept, self-discipline, problem solving, and making choices. The program features cooperative efforts of the community and of the local state university, and informal evaluation results are cited. (CL)

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A Preschool for
Developmentally Advanced (Gifted) Children

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Abstract

A model program for developmentally advanced preschoolers is described, including identification procedures, staffing, and curriculum. An open classroom approach was utilized. Activities included art, music, dance, and drama activities to encourage creative growth; reading, math, and science taught in an exploratory way for those children ready for acceleration; an individualized motor development program; and, parent education. The preschool was centrally located on the campus of the Northwestern State University, easily accessible to major buildings and facilities.

A Preschool for
Developmentally Advanced (Gifted) Children

Early identification and appropriate programming have been shown to be of critical importance in the prevention of chronic patterns of underachievement or negative attitudes toward school. In response to a growing recognition of the special educational needs of gifted youngsters, the State of Louisiana has enacted legislation directed towards identifying and serving the gifted from the age of three years. However, there seems to be a great deal of confusion as to how these youngsters can be identified at such an early age and how their widely varying needs can best be met.

Because of the uncertainty of the validity of test results at age 3, the State Department of Education set the criteria for identification at the pre-school and kindergarten level at (1) three standard deviations above the mean on an individually administered intelligence test, or (2) a combination of 10 points in a matrix which requires that the child score at least two and one half standard deviations above the mean on the individually administered intelligence test and on tests of reading and math. The rationale for these very stringent criteria was the belief that if the cut-off scores were set lower, too many children would be included who would not be able to meet the less stringent criteria required of older children. Yet, research clearly indicates that for many children, identification at the third grade level may be too late. The preschool program described in this paper was formulated to address both problems, identification and appropriate curricula. Specifically, it was designed to 1) develop a valid screening procedures and 2) design a curriculum for gifted preschoolers. An additional purpose was to formulate a parent training program.

Screening and Identification

A case study approach was used to identify the students for the program. To obtain the applications, referrals were solicited from local preschool and day-care facilities, local librarians, sunday-school teachers, art and music teachers, and from the public preschool for the handicapped.

Our definition of giftedness was not limited to the one adhered to by the State, nor did our criteria require an IQ score three standard deviations above the mean. For these reasons, we referred to our program as the preschool for the "developmentally advanced" rather than gifted. We looked for advancement in one of four areas: intellectual, visual and performing arts, social, and psycho-motor. We included children scoring at least 1.5 standard deviations above the mean on any one of the measures but many other factors were also considered.

Instruments utilized included questionnaires to be completed by the parents on cognitive abilities, creative activities, physical development, and social development; the Hess School Readiness Test; the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; the Vineland Scale of Social Maturity; the Torrance Test of Creative Action and Movement; the Gross and Fine Motor Preliminary Checklist; and, the Individualized Physical Development Checklist. In addition, parent and child interviews were conducted and, if possible, the child was observed in a pre-school setting. An evaluation of the art work of those suspected of being artistically gifted was conducted by an artist. After a folder of information was completed on each child, the folders were reviewed to determine eligibility and basis for inclusion in the program: intellectual, visual or performing arts, social, or psychomotor.

Students

The students officially accepted into the program numbered 32; however, other students who were older or younger than the ages accepted visited on a regular basis. Of the 32 students, 26 were white, 4 were black, and two were oriental. There were 10 boys and 22 girls. Their ages ranged from three years one month to four years eleven months. Consistent with our philosophy related to the importance of early intervention, several children with rather severe behavioral problems were accepted.

Physical Facility

The preschool was conducted in the six interconnecting rooms usually occupied by the Child Development Center during the normal school year. This early childhood program is administered by the Department of Home Economics as a function of the Elementary Laboratory School of Northwestern State University. The building and the surrounding playground areas are centrally located on the university's campus and easily accessible to other major buildings and facilities. The motor development program was conducted both at the motor laboratory located in a campus gymnasium and at the laboratory school. The testing and therapy rooms normally used by the Department of Special Education were used for parent interviews, child interviews, and testing.

Schedule

The school was conducted for six weeks on a half-day basis. The program began in mid-June and ended at the close of July. Teachers arrived one-half hour before the children to prepare the rooms and have a faculty meeting. The children arrived between 8:30 and 9:00 A.M. The parents were asked to stagger their arrivals so that we could have time to greet each child individually and get each one settled for the first activity. This half-hour period proved

especially important for the students who had never attended preschool. From 9 to 11:00 A.M., the students had complete freedom to visit any of the rooms and engage in any of the activities. In addition to the six rooms of the facility, several outside play areas were used and a second-floor auditorium (without seats) were used for rainy day activities. The Exploration time was simply explained to the children as a time to find new things and people and to learn about whatever they wished.

After a pick-up time and short circle for announcements of general interest, the children were divided into groups for directed learning. In the 11:00-11:30 time slot, half of the children were sent to the Motor Lab while the other half remained for small group instruction in the area of their choice. The groups were reversed in the 11:30 to 12:00 slot. These periods were named "Directions" since "class" has so many structured connotations.

Starting at 12:00 noon, the children were picked up by their parents. Parents' arrivals were again alternated to give teachers and parents a chance to talk and exchange ideas on the children.

Nowhere in the formal schedule was there a prescribed time for snacks or bathroom visits. The children ate and drank whenever they desired because the refreshments were arranged specifically for self-service. (Fresh fruits and vegetables, juice, and other types of health foods were usually provided. An effort was made to avoid foods containing sugar and food coloring.) Bathroom visits were also accomplished independently and on an as-needed basis.

Staff

The staff at the school on a daily basis consisted of 10 females, including teachers and aides. Graduate students served as teachers and aides with all teaching activities coordinated by a certified teacher who was experienced in early elementary education. Two high school identified gifted students

served as aides on a voluntary basis. This daily staff was augmented by two members of the NSU faculty, one an experienced school psychologist and the other an adapted physical education specialist who assumed responsibility for the motor development program.

Other "guest teachers" were invited as interests developed. Three students from the Home Economics nutrition class conducted cooking lessons, psychology students administered tests, physical education students conducted motor testing and wrote individual plans for each child under the supervision of the specialist.

In addition, resource people, such as parents and other university personnel, were either invited to come to the school or the children were taken to visit them. The students visited staff and faculty in the Music, Art, and Agriculture Departments. They attended a basketball seminar, designed especially for their participation, in the gymnasium; they were visited by a women's historian, a cellist, a violinist, and a policeman who instructed them on safety precautions. The Art Department cooperated in an exhibition of the children's art work by hanging their work for a showing in the main art gallery on campus. We called it "A Short Show" since the pictures were hung at eye level for three-year-olds.

The community was involved when the students visited the public library for story hour or films, the post office for a tour, the local national wildlife and fisheries aquarium, the city animal shelter, and the local radio station.

Goals, Pedagogy, and Curriculum

Jung's (1933) psychological view of the individual and learning was the basis of the teaching. Barbara Clark's (1979) application of Jung's ideas

were used frequently. Education must concern itself with all four ways that children can learn: thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuiting. Therefore, the goals for the summer program addressed not only the child's mental development but his or her emotional, social, and physical development as well. In formulating the exact structure of the program, we were also strongly influenced by Joanne Whitmore's (1980) work with underachieving gifted. We believed that if the strategies and philosophy she used were successful in remediating underachievement, they should be equally successful in preventing it.

To be consistent with the philosophy underlying the program, equal emphasis was placed on the children's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Specific goals for the children were:

- 1) to develop a healthy and realistic self-concept
- 2) to acquire appropriate and effective interpersonal skills
- 3) to establish positive attitudes toward school and learning
- 4) to enhance task commitment
- 5) to increase exploratory behavior and risk-taking
- 6) to facilitate creative and productive thinking
- 7) to acquire higher-level thinking processes

The six interconnecting classrooms gave students a wide variety of activities from which to choose. Discipline, when needed, was accomplished through the use of a "time out" room and/or natural consequences of the students' actions. Figure 1 illustrates the model for learning utilized by the preschool which stresses independent and scientific investigations.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Teachers in each content area were instructed to have four activities in their room which were new each day. Three of these four activities were of an exploratory nature. The fourth was a directed activity which was presented during the Directions Period (11-11:30 or 11:30-12:00 noon). Therefore, every child, every day, could explore three new items or activities in each of the six rooms. Every effort was made to ensure a stimulating environment for the students; bulletin boards and room decorations were changed weekly and toys and other learning materials changed as frequently as practical. Table 1 shows the Exploratory and Directed Activities for the Science Room for a three-week period.

Insert Table 1 about here

Students and parents jointly decided on a course of study for each child in the program. The course offerings were: Math, Science, Reading, Art, Drama, Music, Dance, and Cooking. The curricula included the cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive domains. Each teacher was involved in the development of the whole child and stressed the integrated approach to education which leads to a well-rounded youngster. Emphasis on natural consequences, responsibility, positive self-concept, self-discipline, problem solving, and making choices were integrated in all activities. Intuitive learning was encouraged in every content area, but especially in the arts. Affective learning also was taught in socialization skills, leadership skills, coping skills, and emotional awareness.

The theme around which the curriculum activities were planned was "Animals." Listed below are some of the activities which were used to "teach" about animals:

Wooden animal puzzles	Animal costumes for dress-up
Animal games (Farm Lotto)	Animal recipes ("Ant on a Plant" or "Bugs in a Boat")
Animal puppets	Making animals out of balloons
Picture books of animals	animal riddles
Story books about animals	Matching animal mothers and babies
Student-written stories about pets	Activity sheets (animals matched to thier homes, foods)
Nature walk to identify habitats	Taking pictures of animals
Trip to a farm or poultry house	Songs about animals ("Old McDonald")
Trip to a Zoo	Making a zoo with blocks and stuffed animals
Trip to an animal shelter	Live animals in science room
Trip to a veterinarian's office	Visits by live animals
Trip to an aquarium	Flannelboard animals (counting/classifying)
Trip to a pond or forest	Bug motels (collect/identify/release insects)
Trip to a taxidermist	Posters and pictures of animals
Trip to biology building to see specimens	Grouping exercises with plastic animals
Creative dramatics ("The Three Bears")	Commercially-available toys (Fisher-Price Farm Set)
Listening to music about animals ("Flight of the Bumblebee")	Mural (animals that live on land, animals in the water)
Records of animal sounds	Spelling animal words
Animal alphabet (What animal name starts with "A"?)	Oral stories about animals (Teacher can begin; children end.)
Making bird feeders	Ant farm

Using animal stickers to make booklets	Animal computer software ("Fe Frode's Secrets")
Drawing animals	Animal sculpture (group project)
Animal cookie cutters and clay	Looking at paintings of animals
Animal silhouettes (shadow puppets)	Films about animals

While this animal unit was our major emphasis, teachers also included a variety of other activities as well. The curriculum areas were not treated as strictly segregated nor as discrete units; there was much overlapping in activities and much multi-disciplinary planning. The science room, for example, had paintings of animals; the computer had language activities; the music students practiced counting beats; the cooking lessons incorporated reading, measuring, sequencing, and following directions. Thus, while a teacher was "responsible" for a room and a content area, there were no absolute boundaries. Importantly, the students also contributed to the development of the curriculum. Whatever was of interest to the children was included. Because we had no rigid scope and sequence, no timetable for skill development, we were free to seize upon momentary inspirations and interests as they appeared.

Parent Education

A very important aspect of the program was parent education. Involvement of the parents was begun in the selection process with parent interviews and questionnaires completed by the parents. Open House and parent involvement in the child's transition came next. Daily parent conferences took place on an informal basis when children arrived and departed and more formal conferences were scheduled.

Regular meetings of the parents were scheduled at night to disseminate information on parenting skills, characteristics of gifted and advanced children, opportunities for art and music instruction in the community, and

so on. Additionally, weekly newsletters were sent home informing parents of the activities of the children at school. These newsletters also had suggestions for follow-up activities at home. Packets of information such as copies of helpful articles were also sent.

A social worker provided individual counseling and conducted a day-long workshops at the close of the program. The workshop covered advocacy, discipline, educational rights, and many more topics which would be helpful to the parents.

A lending library was established on a temporary basis so that parents could read on child development, parenting, and giftedness. Table 2 illustrates the areas of parent education covered during the six-weeks program and the methods used for delivery.

Insert Table 2 about here

Motor Development Program

The motor development aspect of the preschool program was considered very important for a variety of reasons. Students were tested by faculty and students from the Health and Physical Education Department using motor skills checklists. The program as implemented was dependent upon the selection of general developmental sequences in the areas of balance, locomotion, receipt and propulsion, visual perception, and socialization. Each child was evaluated in each of these areas and individual programs were developed. In order to individualize, a stations approach was utilized. Five stations were established which corresponded with the five developmental areas mentioned above. Program implementation was based on the application of developmental patterning techniques designed to open neuromuscular pathways. (For a description of the Motor Development Lab, see Appendix A and Appendix B for the Sequence Sheet Activities.)

Parents were informed of each child's overall ability as well as deficit areas and strengths. Brief suggestions were also made concerning activities at home that might help in deficit areas. Students scoring 1.5 standard deviations above the mean for their chronological age were included in the program as being gifted in the psychomotor area. Activities were supervised by the adapted physical education specialist and were executed by several graduate students in the motor laboratory. Specific goals for the program were:

- 1) to facilitate the development of fine and gross motor skills
- 2) to develop interest in health and physical fitness throughout life
- 3) to promote an interest in leisure time activities, leading to wholesome interaction with family and peers
- 4) to enhance the development of body awareness and a positive self-concept
- 5) to develop an understanding of the importance of exercise in maintaining a healthy body and mind

Evaluation of the Preschool

A parent evaluation questionnaire was distributed at the close of the program to obtain opinions of the program as it existed in 1983 and suggested changes for 1984. Eighteen of the 32 children's parents responded. Of the 18 replies to each question regarding the program, 16 were favorable or highly favorable and 2 were neutral. Parent comments were positive in all aspects; however, two suggestions appeared. First, reduce the number of children in the program (even though with a population of 32, the student/teacher ratio was only 4:1) and to rotate children to all teachers on a regular basis. The second suggested was based on the parents' dismay

that all children did not go on all field trips.

The value of the program in terms of having met the specific goals and whether or not the screening procedures have validity have yet to be determined. Continuous data collection over a period of approximately five years with programming expected to continue until at least the third grade will be necessary in order to accurately evaluate the program's effectiveness in meeting the goals pertaining to positive attitudes and in preventing underachievement. Efforts are being made to acquire funding for this purpose.

Evaluation of the program by the students was not done formally. However, absenteeism was very low and evidence of positive feelings toward the program itself were numerous. Children ran to school in the morning; they were reluctant to leave at 12:00 and their parents reported that they dressed cheerfully and did morning routines quickly in order to get to school. Of particular note was the students' attitudes and loyalty toward "their school" when asked to return either to home play or to a day-care center at the end of our project. Our youngest child thought she was being kept from school as a punishment when the program ended. In order to reassure her and to help her understand that the school was over, it was necessary for the entire family to accompany her to the deserted facility. She slowly walked from room to room, noting the changes that had occurred in terms of cleaned bulletin boards, rearranged furniture, etc. As she walked back out the front door, she turned, waved at the empty rooms, and with a sad look on her face said, "Bye, school'."

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MODEL FOR LEARNING
BY GIFTED PRESCHOOL STUDENTS

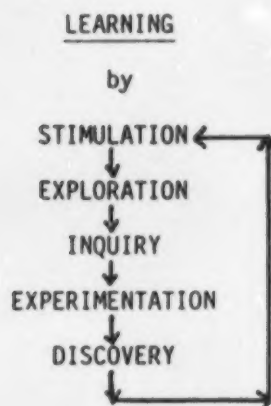


Fig. 1

Table 1

Exploratory and Directed Activities

TEACHER Deborah

ROOM Science

Date	Exploratory Activities			Directed Activity
M 6-13	Rabbit	Magnifying Glass	Magnets	Kinds of Animals
T 6-14	Mouse	Incubator	Nesting Toys	Animal Homes
W 6-15	Frog	Lizards	Animal Lotto (Zoo)	Nature Walk
Th 6-16	Turtle	Make Terrarium	Flannel Nos.	"Habitat" & Sheet
F 6-17	Honey Combs	Dot-to-Dot Sheets	Dominoes	Bug Hotels
M 6-20	Chicks	Sea Shells	Animal Puzzles	Feed Ducks
T 6-21	Bird Nests	Plant Cacti	Gears	Trip to Aquarium
W 6-22	Hawk	Plastic Animals	Animal Match Game	Animal Foods
Th 6-23	Parakeet	Frog Songs	Scales	Trip to Sheep Farm
F 6-24	Gerbils	Cocoons	Sweet Potato	Sheet, Discussion on Diet
M 6-27	Crickets	Bird Feeders	Animal Lotto (Farm)	Make Bird Feeders
T 6-28	Fill Aquarium	Whale Songs	Measuring Cups	Trip to Agriculture Barn
W 6-29	Finches	Animal Photos	Magnetic Numbers	Farm/Zoo Animals
Th 6-30	Worms	Fruit	Plant Seeds	Wild/Tame Animals
F 7-1	Ant Farm	Microscope	Rulers, etc.	Trip to Animal Shelter

Table 2

Parent Education

Areas Covered	Delivery Methods
Advocacy	Teacher Modeling
Parenting Skills	Workshops
Characteristics of gifted individuals	Parent Meetings
Information on child development	Parent/Teacher Conferences
Coping skills for parents	Counseling Sessions
"How to help" at home	Weekly Newsletter
Awareness of child's gifts	Packets of Information
Acceptance of child's gifts	Lending Library on Giftedness and Child Development
Changing parent expectations	Guest Speakers
Information on self-concept formation	Interpretation of Test Results
Needs of the gifted child	"Rap" Sessions

APPENDIX A

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM*

The motor development program was based on individualized programmed learning. In order to individualize programs, a stations approach is recommended. The five stations are as follows: Balance (dynamic and static), Locomotion, Receipt and Propulsion, Visual Perception, and Socialization.

Description of Stations

Station 1 - Balance: In the developmental sequence an individual learns to maintain balance. Out of the experience of learning to maintain balance, a reference point is developed. This reference point is the center of gravity where the concepts of up, down, front and back, and left and right are learned. Thus, balance sets the stage for learning about spatial relationships (Kephart, 1960). Activities at this station range from line walking to balance beam walking. It also includes such skills as standing on one leg, doing an angel stand, and balancing various objects.

Station 2 - Locomotion: In the developmental sequence an individual learns to crawl and then, as he develops, higher locomotor skills emerge. These activities include rolling, creeping, walking, jumping, hopping, skipping, running, etc.

Station 3 - Receipt and Propulsion: In the developmental sequence an individual learns the divisions of the body, and develops concepts involved in spatiality. In order to use both sides of the body in opposition, and to judge distances and related spatial relationships, one must learn to propel and receive objects. The activities at this station are throwing, catching, kicking and stopping objects, using various patterns and objects.

Station 4 - Visual Perception: In the developmental sequence an individual learns to visually discriminate, visually track, thereby developing a hierarchy of visual perception skills. These activities include the use of scoops, paddles, visual motor control bats, and the development of various target type skills.

Station 5 - Socialization: In the developmental sequence an individual learns to use motor skills in a socializing manner. Games at this station include bowling, horseshoes, frisbee, shuffleboard, croquet, etc.

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APPENDIX B

SEQUENCE SHEET ACTIVITIES*Static Balance:

Angel Stand
 Cross Legged Stand
 Heel-Toe Stand
 3 pt, 2 pt Stand
 Squat Balance
 One Leg Stand
 Tip Toe Stand
 V-Sit
 Side Lying
 Balance Objects
 Partner Stunts

Dynamic Balance

Line Walk
 Between 2 Boards
 H. Ladder
 Tip Toe Walk
 Walk on Foot Prints
 Walk on Top of Boards
 Walk Balancing Objects
 Heel Toe - Walking

Visual Perception

Scoops
 Chalkboard Activities
 Racket Skills
 Moving Targets (Hanging)
 Visual Motor Control Bat

Socialization

Frisbee
 Bowling
 Horseshoes
 Croquet
 Shuffleboard
 Lawn Bowling (Bocceball)
 Dancing
 Games - Individual, Partner and Team

Locomotion

Rolling
 Creeping
 Kneewalk
 Jumping
 Hopping
 Running
 Skipping
 Galloping

Propulsion

2 Hand Chest Pass
 One Hand Overhand Throw
 Bounce Pass
 Underhand Throw
 Kicking
 Throwing Different Objects
 Darts

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